

ONE HOUR FOR BUDDHISM



HENRY VAN ZEYST

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Introduction

The author Henri G. A. van Zeyst, whose writings from 1938 up to 1949 were published under his religious name as a Buddhist monk in Sri Lanka, Bhikkhu Dhammapāla, is now leading a very retired life in the hill-country of what is presently known as Sri Lanka.

The apparent gap of time in his writings (1949-1969) does not indicate, however, a mental rustication; for, apart from his opus magnum, the Norm, which still remains in manuscript form with the Printer and Publisher, he has during that period contributed very liberally many articles to the Encyclopaedia of Buddhism, of which he was at that time for several years the Senior Assistant Editor and Administrative Officer at the Campus of the Ceylon University in Peradeniya. His various broadcasts on Buddhism were well received, and some were published in the Radio Times.

His views on the teaching of the Buddha are lately not of the stereotyped “dogmatic” attitude, so often found in popular publications, but show an independent approach to and search for the basic teachings without their mediaeval decorations. But the result remains as orthodox Theravāda as ever, although the setting of these “gems” is more suited to the modern mind, which has hardly time to spare, even if it were only “One hour for Buddhism”.

Shanti Bhadra Theta

Bodhimaggarama, Muttetuwegama,
Sri Lanka.

23rd June, 1974

Author's Preface to the first Edition

It has been said that it is the duty of old men to lie to the young ones, to allow them to discover their own disillusionments. Yet, it is hard to witness so much waste which could have been prevented, if there had been only a few more pointers to show the edge of the road, if not its end.

And so, nearing the seventieth year of this individual life span, words had to be spoken when thoughts became too forceful.

The following pages are not more than pointers. Originally conceived as six broadcasts for the Overseas Service, each of ten minutes, they got their birth-name from that. But some technical block-head prevented this, and now they are offered here in a printed form. This publication was made possible from the turn-over of the sale of an earlier publication, "The Challenge to Buddhism", for which generous contributions were responsible. Again the price of this "hour" has been kept down to cover the expenses of printing and publishing, which, however, have doubled during the last two years.

Go forth. my little child, in this cold world to warm the hearts
and waken the minds of some few who may be ready to blossom and
bear fruit, even within this “Hour”.

Henri G. A. van Zeyst

Bandarawela
Sri Lanka

Foreword to the Second Edition

While writing the text for the broadcasts of One Hour for Buddhism, and preparing it later for publication, I had the feeling that it would be last.

That is now more than four years ago. Since then, with the help of my present enthusiastic publishers, there have been several new booklets printed, and quite a few more are ready in various stages of compilation and publication.

Thus, without taking much notice, we found suddenly that this little booklet had run its course without being able to supply the demand. Hence this second edition was planned without any change in the text.

It seems to have fulfilled my wish that it would warm the hearts and waken the minds of some few.

May these blossoms bear fruit.

Henri van Zeyst,

Kandy
November 1978

The Word of the Buddha

This is going to be a series of essays with a difference, I hope. Of course, they will be based on the word of the Buddha; and that means we shall speak on various aspects of Buddhism, as we accept it to have been taught by the Buddha, now more than 25 centuries ago. This word of the Buddha, however, we should obviously not take too literally, for then we would not even understand it. He certainly did not speak English.

It is said that he used some vernacular language, some form of prakrit, which at his time was a spoken dialect (Pāli) which existed alongside with, and was still growing out of a dead language, known as Sanskrit. It was a case comparable to the modern, Italian language, which dynamically developed from the Latin language.

Sanskrit, as Latin, had become the language of art and science, of dogmatic learning and speculative philosophy, of the courts, of the universities, of anything which required a fixity of concept. But, those are concepts of the learned professions, of scholarly debates, of technical expositions, which do not with immediate effect touch the ordinary lives of thousands and millions of people living in the world, struggling for existence, being born and dying like anybody else, every day and night.

As we see in modern times the Christian churches abandoning the ancient languages of Hebrew, Greek and Latin, and even the archaic English in order to contact the masses in their vernacular

languages—so the Sanskrit language, failing to touch the understanding and the emotions of the common man, was abandoned by our teacher, Gotama the Buddha, who spoke to his people in a language which did not even have a script of its own, something like English and French, borrowing not only concepts and words from Latin and Greek, but even their Roman alphabet.

We must keep all that in mind when we speak of the word of the Buddha. He spoke a language which was understood by the masses, who in the short time of a few centuries had adopted his views all over India, and spread them with missionary zeal to foreign countries, where up to this date they constitute not a mere monument to his doctrine, but a truly living religion. This has withstood persecution and foreign influence, and is emerging these days with a renewed vigour and modern application, proving the essential value of the doctrine, notwithstanding the many challenges in present-day society, socio-economic problems, conflicts between science and ethics, philosophy and psychology.

Such is the word of the Buddha which we shall try to understand in this forthcoming series, as applicable to our needs, in terms of our understanding with the relative limitations of space and time, of concept and environment; for, our understanding will be relative, till such time as our comprehension will be perfect.

A reliance on technical terms of thousands of years ago may easily lead us away from its practicality; and at reliance on the word of the Buddha, when we have no absolute evidence of his actual words, is equally dangerous. There are, however, found in the Buddhist texts certain sayings which on their internal evidence clearly show to have originated from no one else but the Buddha; and on the other hand, there will be sayings attributed to him by the compilers of the texts, which, again on internal evidence, are so uncharacteristic of an enlightened teacher, that we may safely ignore them, if we do not wish to reject them altogether.

Among those sayings attributed to the Buddha, there is one in particular which has such a perfect ring of sincerity, that nobody else would have dared to interpolate that saying. Here the Buddha speaks of the essentials of existence in a tone which lacks all stress on authority, for it is something which does not depend on him or any Buddha or any god, but which is the very essence of being, whether it is revealed or not. “Whether a Tathāgata (that is, a supremely enlightened Buddha who can teach us) has arisen or not, still it remains a fact that everything is impermanent, in conflict and without substance.”

Now I repeat that it is impossible to imagine any monk or priest having fabricated such a saying which in fact tells us that we need not rely on the authority of a Buddha, that we need not depend on the saving grace of any teacher, in order to find out by experience each one for himself that everything is impermanent, in conflict and without substance.

To put it all in simpler words, though not the actual words of the Buddha, it is said here: Buddha or no Buddha—life is without security for it has no permanence in duration; it has no intrinsic value to fight about; it has no essential existence to cling to.

The conclusions to be drawn from this are extremely far reaching and fundamental at the same time. The Buddha speaks of facts, but he is not responsible for them. In other words, he is not a creator-god who has made this universe either for his own glory or for our hard labour. He merely points out some essential truths which we all know perhaps, but which we prefer to ignore. We prefer to live and work as if life will be everlasting. We prefer to struggle in this life as if the outcome will solve all our problems. We prefer to work for a goal which is our own destiny according to our own view of life.

Well, here we have a teacher, who has gone the way himself, all the way (and that is the meaning of the word Tathāgata), who has gone beyond and who now tells us that things are not as we wish to

make them. But he also tells us to find it out for ourselves, not to rely on him, except perhaps as one who has found it out for himself, and whose path to follow may be helpful in our own discoveries. But we have to go out ourselves on this voyage of discovery. And until I have found my own truth, I shall be merely repeating the words of the Buddha which thereby will never become my own, never alive and living in reality. About this reality, more hereafter.

Reality and Realisation

I ended my previous essay in this series with some sort of a promise that I would touch next time on reality. But now I find that I cannot keep that promise, because in all honesty I must admit that I do not know what reality is. Yet it is very important to know because without that knowledge how can there ever be realisation?

I am afraid that we use that word very glibly. Even a linguistic authority as the Oxford Dictionary is not helpful, for there we are told that reality is synonymous with fact. What is real is said to be actually existing as a thing, or occurring in fact. And so we are taught to distinguish between real roses and artificial ones. Now I feel that we should be much more careful in our language, for if we do not take care in using our own words, how shall we ever be able to understand the word of the Buddha?

For him, realisation was knowing and seeing things as they are. In Pāli: (*yathā-bhūta-ñāṇa-dassana*). This term occurs in the various texts so many times and with so great consistency, that we may safely accept it as a term coined, or at least used by the Buddha himself. To know with understanding and see with insight is, of course, much more than what a tourist can learn from a guide book. It is a personal experience of the essential nature of something which cannot be had through a chemical analysis, which may be able to give all information about compounds and their phenomenal characteristics, but which can give no insight into its nature.

We can learn the working of a machine, even of an atom; we can learn of the forces at work in reaction; we can learn the working of organisms and even of the mind; but all that does not tell us what matter is, and what mind. In other words, our knowledge is limited to the actuality which we experience and to the reactions thereto; but it is not knowledge of the essential nature of anything, how or what it is when it does not act or react, which is knowledge of the thing-in-itself, of the thing in the abstract and unrelated to anything else; for, that is the absolute existence that we do not know and that we cannot know. Our very knowledge thereof would make it relative, and thereby it would become actual.

Actuality is how a thing acts and reacts. Reality is the thing in itself outside all relationship. Realisation, therefore, would be insight into the nature of thought, into the nature of material phenomena, whereas knowledge of the working of matter or mind would merely constitute knowledge of actuality, which is as far as experimental knowledge can go. A distinction made, therefore, between growing roses and artificial ones is not a knowledge of realisation, but of actuality.

Now, what does constitute reality in the words of the Buddha? This can only be approached through a process of elimination, which may be strange to a mind trained in Western methods of positivism and dogmatism, but which is much easier acceptable to a mind accustomed to a negative approach, which is the only realistic one.

We have a certain accumulation of experimental knowledge through which, through many particular observations, we conclude to some general principles. But as those principles are not more than ideal abstractions, they cannot be realistic, and cannot, therefore, provide any new knowledge. But as this is the only knowledge we have, we can at least reject it as not being conducive to fresh understanding. This rejection is a negative approach, which we meet over and over again in Buddhism, not only in the more elaborate philo-

sophic treatises of the Abhidhamma, but even in the most simple enumerations, formulas, descriptions etc.

Thus, when all phenomena of actuality, material as well as mental, are said to be complexes (*saṅkhāra*), dependent in their origination and cessation on a multitude of conditions, it is obvious that the reality must be non-complex and unconditioned (*asaṅkhata*). And as all compositions, by their very nature of being compounded, have the built-in tendency towards decomposition, it is the most logical and only possible conclusion to arrive at, that all components are impermanent: (*sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā*).

And again, because all these compositions are subject to impermanence and change, and are therefore mere phenomena, appearances, actuality without reality, they naturally lack all substance, entity, abiding essence apart from their existence, which is a mere process of becoming and cessation, a rise and a fall of a wave which does not exist individually outside the process of conditioned origination. And because all actuality is conditioned and impermanent, it follows that the only reality which is not conditioned must, by nature, be permanent. For, what is not composed cannot be decomposed.

So, without realising it, we have already had a few glimpses of realisation of the absolute, not in experience, but none the less true. For, in understanding the false there appears the truth, not as an axiom or a dogma, not personified as a god; but, in the falling away of the veils of ignorance there stands revealed the only reality for which we cannot strive, which we cannot endeavour to attain, which is not a goal to be achieved, and for which we have no name but the negation of delusion, nirvana.

Since the concept of individuality as an entity, as a substance, as a soul of a permanent duration and stability, is the great delusion from which springs all ignorance, desire for existence, clinging for continuance—it is impossible that there should be such a soul even in the permanence of the unconditioned. Therefore the Buddha

said that all component and conditioned phenomena are impermanent and without substance. But, when all conditioned phenomena have ceased and, therefore, nothing of an impermanent nature has remained, there still cannot be the arising of a permanent entity or soul. And so, the characteristic of impermanence (*anicca*) is found only in the complex composition (*saṅkhāra*): (*sabbe saṅkhārā anicca*); and not in the unconditioned (*asankhata*) Nibbāna. But the characteristic of no-soul, no-self, no entity (*anatta*) remains, whether in phenomenal actuality (*saṅkhāra*) or in absolute reality (*asankhata*): (*sabbe dhammā anattā*).

Such is the nature of all things; and the comprehension of that nature is the realisation of the false, and hence of truth.

Escapes

I am sure you must have found my previous essay rather difficult and even boring, but I hope you will appreciate that a journey of discovery in the land of an ancient philosophy has its own peculiar difficulties which have to be overcome, and not merely by-passed.

That brings us to another problem which most of us prefer to ignore, if we cannot make an escape. In fact, our whole life in the modern set-up of society is one big act of escaping. And I think it is about time that we open our eye, that we wake up at least in awareness of what we are doing. Most of our activity is involved in contradictions: We work hard so that we may have leisure; we eat less so that we may eat better; we accumulate in the present for use in the future; we deny many things to ourselves so that our children may enjoy them after us; we sacrifice comfort because we do not dare to offend convention. And then there are, of course, the thousand-and-one little things we have to do or not to do, not because we like it that way, but because the dictates from outside are so strong that we have to submit to uncomfortable clothing, to early rising, to fixed working hours, to uncongenial dwelling places, to loathsome companions, to limited income, to unpalatable food, to disagreeable climates, not to speak of ill-health, bad temper, physical handicaps ... quite enough to justify the American definition that life is one damned thing after another.

And what do we do about it? If we cannot improve the conditions of our work, we try to forget them after work. And how! We smoke, we dance, we drink, we make love, and make the fullest use of the many ways of escape offered to us by others who are equally bored, but who make a business of our nuisance, who fatten their bodies on the leanness of our minds.

Are we truly living? Is not our life but one great chain-reaction in which we are caught up? Why? And is it necessary?

Unable to fathom the bottom of our misery, some have attempted an escape which is not of indulgence and of forgetfulness, but one of sublimation. Then we pray and turn religious, or we drown ourselves in work for others, social work for the poor and the sick, or we lose ourselves in organisations, political, ecclesiastical, or just social organisations, clubs for youth, for rehabilitation, for debating ... any odd thing would do, just as long as we can forget. We turn our eyes from this world and try to escape in the supernatural; we deny the needs of the body and think we are virtuous. We follow some blind impulse and call it a vocation.

Why?

We have seen earlier that the intrinsic nature of any composition is a built-in tendency towards decomposition. We know and we have experienced that everything is transient. But that in itself need not frighten or worry us, for the unpleasant and the undesirable also are transient. We know that behind every cloud there is sunshine. And so that cannot be the cause of our dullness and dejection, for we need not attempt an escape, if we only wait long enough for the storm to blow over. Our difficulty is that we cannot wait; we have to do something about it. And without knowing what it is all about, we plunge ourselves into action to do something.

Can we afford just now five minutes more of our precious time? Can we devote these five minutes to doing nothing but finding out the answer to the question: Why? rather than looking for an escape with the question: How?

Why do I want to escape? Why do I want to do anything at all? In other words: What is the nature of action?

The majority of our activity is the result of conditioning. This may be the long process of nature, heredity, environment, character, education etc., or the quick sudden challenge to which our action was a response. In either case our action was a reaction, something like a conditioned reflex. And the nature of such reflex is naturally dependent, not only on the challenge calling for a response, but also on the ground, the background, the foundation, the soil, the environment giving life to that reaction. And so, an action is quite a complicated thing, a complex, which does not yet answer our question: Why should there be a reaction at all?

A reaction may be a process of absorption, of assimilation; it may be one of repulsion. But, however different and contrary these reactions may appear, they are actually of the same type in which there is an expression following the impression or the impact: an agreeable action is welcomed, but a disagreeable action is repelled in reaction.

I press on with my question. Why?

Whatever is agreeable to me supports me, gives me strength, if not physically, certainly emotionally. It is the herd-instinct which gives me courage in which I find the accumulated strength which I lack individually. Comfort in company gives that extra sense of security which I seek in food, clothing and shelter. In other words: the agreeable strengthens the 'ego' by expansion in numbers, by addition, in security, by safety in satisfaction.

The disagreeable, on the other hand, is experienced as a kind of aggression. It gives a danger signal as pain, if there is something wrong in the system. As a disease it disturbs my case; as a disturbance it upsets my feeling of safety; it never flatters, never builds up my self-esteem, and hence it is repelled in my reaction.

In short, the agreeable is welcomed because it strengthens the self; the disagreeable is rejected because it weakens the self. Al-

though opposites, they have the same object, the self, which acts as the reactor. But why should the self react?

Let us put the question the other way round: What could happen if the self did not react? The ‘self’ as a concept of individuality, as a substance, as a soul of permanent duration and stability, can only maintain, itself in action, just because it is a delusion which has no substance. It is only in deluded action of assimilation or repulsion that the image of an individual ‘self’ can be maintained. And it is this reaction to an action which creates and maintains this delusion. Thus, if the ‘self’ would not react, it would not be, it could not maintain its own delusion. But maintenance is necessary for continuance; and it is in this opposition between the universal truth of universal impermanence—and the desire for continuance with the psychological need of permanence—it is in this opposition that is born the conflict of which the Buddha said that it is the essence of all conditioned states: *sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhā*, which I would like to translate in terms of the above as: every complex is a conflict.

That is the basic truth on which the word of the Buddha is built: There is conflict because there is a complex in which the desire for permanent existence of ‘self’ clashes with the impermanent nature of all conditions. And when there is no ‘self’ there is no conflict either.

Creation in Evolution

I have, of course, no way of finding out what your reactions have been so far to my three previous essays in this series. But the fact that you have turned another page to this fourth one may be an indication that you have not altogether rejected "the word of the Buddha", as I hear and understand it today after 25 centuries. Still, I have no illusions in this respect: for, I am aware that my presentation is not an easy one; but then, I am not very good in story-telling; and I do know that there are several other approaches to the word of the Buddha open to you which would probably cater more to your emotions, which would no doubt be more flattering to your 'ego', and misunderstanding.

A very brief recapitulation of what we have understood so far may be useful. First of all we discovered that the Buddha is a teacher who does not demand blind faith, but who has indicated a certain method, following which we have made a few discoveries for ourselves. He gave us a few truths, which are neither axioms which cannot be proved, nor dogmas which must be accepted on authority. They are rather statements of fact, even though we must admit that we had not seen those facts before, notwithstanding their universality. Of course, we know that there is nothing lasting under the sun, and not even the sun itself. But in our desire for security and stability we have created a permanent refuge in the supernatural.

This awareness of impermanence and the desire for permanence have naturally caused the arising of conflict which is inherent in any complex. As the cause of this conflict is the delusion of permanency in a ‘self’ or substance, or soul, or god, it requires only the abolition of such delusion to be free from all conflict.

Here we find embedded the three characteristics of the Buddha’s word that all conditioned things are impermanent (*anicca*), that they will constitute a basis of conflict (*dukkha*) as long as we have not realised the truth, that there is no self (*anatta*) to be involved in such conflict. The conflict itself is, therefore, a delusion, but it is a very actual delusion, which we cannot get rid of by more reasoning. Not real, but actual.

Apart from the Noble Eightfold Path, there is the doctrine of dependent origination (*paticca-samuppāda*), which is actually an expansion of the truth of the origin of conflict (*dukkha-samudaya*). It is of this doctrine that I wish to speak today, to be followed next by a few words on karma and rebirth.

When the Buddha spoke of dependent origination, he traced the lineage of conflict back to its ultimate origin through a long chain of conditional causes and their effects. And when he had ultimately traced the root-cause, he made it abundantly clear that this root is not the ultimate beginning of an absolute creation, but rather the fabric on which the entire pattern of birth and death is woven.

This beginning is not ‘in the beginning’ of time, but it is always there as the foundation of actuality, the force of evolution, the fuel to the fire of craving, never spending itself but always feeding on delusion, non-existent in reality, because it is a mere negation of insight, of truth, of realisation; and is called ignorance (*avijja*). As long as ignorance prevails, we shall act in foolishness, beget in conflict, and produce violence, till we die in greater ignorance than that which gave us birth. For, this ignorance is the delusion of separateness, of individuality, of continuity; and out of such ignorance the only action possible is a misconception of a ‘self’, which will act

with volition (*saṅkhāra*) which is karma—and which will produce more darkness out of willful delusion. In that darkness we continue to grope and grasp at anything which may give a temporary foothold. Thus the mind clings to matter, and the body follows the mind (*nāma-rūpa*), while the six senses spread and stretch as feelers and creepers to lay hold of the material elements (*pathavī, āpo, tejo, vayo*), that push and pull, and burn and turn, as fire goes in search of new fuel to maintain itself, till all is burning with love and hate in a consuming passion, which is life. In that evolution of craving and clinging and becoming (*tañhā, upādāna, bhava*) arises the opposition, the struggle for life, which places ‘self’ against the other, conflict born of ignorance and giving birth to delusion.

Thus, evolution is also involution, growth is decay, birth is death. And thus existence continues as a process of actuality, of conditions and effects, of action and reaction, of life which is death, of beginning which is also cessation. For, nothing is real, in the sense of static, permanent, substantial. There are no individual waves and yet they roll on and rise and break themselves at the height of their might, leaving but a frosty foam from which new waves will arise, roll on and cease.

Isn’t this a teaching of despair? Is there no hope of salvation? Must this wheel of Samsāra roll on for ever?

This doctrine of dependent origination is fortunately also a doctrine of dependent cessation. For, in the same way as the effects are there in dependence on the arising of conditions, so the effects will not be there at the cessation of those conditions. Just as a fire burns as long as we provide fuel, and when the fuel is not forthcoming the fire will burn out, so conflict depends on the delusion of ‘self’ which causes the opposition; and conflict will cease when there is no more opposition.

As long as the delusion of a permanent self is maintained by craving for more, by clinging to existence, by the passions of love and hate, there will be continuation and rebecoming of that deluded

'self'. But when in the understanding of the process of action and reaction it is seen that the desire for permanence has created this mirage of a soul, then the dream will be seen as a dream, and vanish. When the false is seen as false, there is truth.

And that is, as the Buddha said, to see things as they are: *yathā-bhūta-ñāna-dassana*.

How simple, isn't it? Well, just try it.

Karma and Rebirth

On several occasions I have referred to the doctrine of the Buddha as the doctrine of actuality. And this is nowhere more in evidence than in his teaching of karma. To understand this correctly, we have from the start to disabuse our mind of some misleading concepts which unfortunately are very commonly found in superficial writings and talks.

Karma is not a fatal destiny with which man is born to lead his life to a predetermined end. Karma means action, which term has been further qualified by the Buddha to indicate only volitional action (*cetanā*). Thus only a wilful or intentional act can be considered as a karmic action. And even then, such an intentional act may not always produce its logical effects, depending on internal and external conditions.

When we link the two concepts of karma and rebirth, there is the connection of cause and effect. But here again, we should be careful not to attribute to this cause all the functions of a cause in the Aristotelian sense. An intentional action may not be the productive cause. I may shoot a man with the intention of killing him, but if my gun misfires, my action is not that of killing. And so, whatever my evil deed may be, it is not murder.

Thus, action is not always the cause of the result, but may merely be a condition thereto. There are many conditions which contribute towards the success or failure of an action. And as only those actions

which bear fruit are responsible and effective, it is in conjunction with the result that an act should be classified.

We have also to look at the result before grading an act as moral or immoral. The terms used by the Buddha for the ideas of moral and immoral do not convey the ideas of virtue and sin. ‘Kusala’ means skilful, wholesome, and its opposite ‘akusala’ is then unskilful, unwholesome. For, in Buddhism there is no concept of sin. As there is no place for a god-creator whom to obey, there is no place either for an offence by transgressing his law. A wrong action is a foolish action, unhealthy, unwholesome, unskilful, because of the evil effect produced by it. If there is any sin, it is a sin against ourselves or against the community as we intentionally turn against our mental health in an act of foolishness. For, karma is a productive force which, as any purposeful action, has the intrinsic need of self-expression, self-expansion, self-reproduction, which we call rebirth.

Here again we have to be careful in avoiding the common misconception that rebirth according to the Buddha is the same as transmigration. The concept of transmigration necessitates the view of a passing over from here to there of a soul in its migration from life to life, as a person would go from room to room. The locality changes, but the person remains the same with all his characteristics, good and bad.

But in Buddhism, with our most characteristic doctrine of anatta, according to which there is no substance underlying the changing material phenomena, no soul or abiding entity sustaining the individuality of a living person, no eternal essence dwelling in absolute existence, we have to view rebirth not as a re-incarnation or transmigration, but as an action becoming the effect. A question produces an answer, a challenge calls up a response, a stimulus calls forth a reaction. And so, an action which intentionally and purposefully expresses itself is bound to leave its imprint, and thereby becomes the effect.

Each action, being itself an expression, a product of environment, characteristic tendencies, inhibitions and external stimuli, must live in its action to impress again, and as it were, fertilise in reaction to continue its cycle, which is rebirth. Thus, stinginess leads to poverty, not because a stingy man is reborn as a pauper, but the actions of miserliness, which have become a habit, create an atmosphere of destitution which lacks security akin to poverty. Thus, he who acts is not reborn; and yet he lives again in the effects of his deeds. But he is not the same (*na ca so*), said the Buddha; neither is he someone else (*na ca añño*), because the effects are a direct result of those actions.

This kind of rebirth is not restricted to the great change we call death. Change occurs at any moment in the process, and so does rebirth. Sometimes, the change is a long process of growth, when a boy grows into manhood and acquires a totally different outlook on life in the course of years. But sometimes the change occurs suddenly under the shock of a great calamity. The continuation of individuality remains visible, but the alteration in perception is so fundamental, perhaps, that we speak of a conversion, and a complete break with the past is evident. Yet, each action is as the seed of a mighty tree, which carries within its tiny shell the entire past of its ancestral lineage, and also the potential force to pass on all that acquired vitality together with the assumed nutriment of the present into a future which will bear not only the resemblance, but the very imprint of action.

And so our deeds
Are all like seeds
And bring forth fruit in kind¹

This doctrine of the Buddha concerning rebirth in the light of his essential teaching of soullessness would be understood so much

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better, if it would be thought of, not as the change at the end of a life-span, but as the reaction set up by a volitional activity. Even this present endeavour of mine to convey to you, my readers, some idea about rebirth, is bound to have some repercussion, either approval or disapproval, acceptance, rejection, doubt, endeavour to understand, misunderstanding etc. Thus this action of mine is re-born as reaction. Without a medium, without an entity passing over, without my dying here to be reborn with you. Thus action gives birth to reaction, and becomes the reaction; the same, and yet not the same.

But there is also action which is not purposeful, an act done with the necessity to act, following the perfect understanding of the need to act. Such an act has no intention, and does not project itself into an intended reaction. Such action is above good and evil, and can, set us free from rebirth.

Deliverance

In this present series I have outlined some views on the teachings of the Buddha, for which he himself did not expect a blind submission. From the three salient or characteristic marks we have learned to direct an independent view on the arising and ceasing process of phenomena. In that light we have reviewed the concepts of morality and rebirth; and now in the last essay of this current series it is fitting to devote some thoughts to that process of deliverance, which must remain the culmination of every spiritual endeavour.

I ended my previous essay by saying that there is some kind of action which can set us free from rebirth, and that means freedom from conflict. On an earlier occasion we have seen already, that conflict (*dukkha*) is conditioned by a desire of a fictitious ‘self’ for a continued existence, notwithstanding the universal experience of impermanence. To set us free from this conflict is the avowed goal of the Buddha, as he said: “Just as there is in the wide ocean but one taste, the taste of salt, so there is in my teaching but one taste, the taste of deliverance.”

This brings us face to face with a very peculiar difficulty. We all experience this conflict in various degrees as pain, sorrow, disappointment, both physical, and mental. And as we naturally prefer to be in peace rather than at war, we strive for a solution of such conflict almost instinctively. We have developed many complicated systems to keep off danger; for, our need for security and securing

our property is one of the primary wants of our nature. Our whole structure of society, of life in community, has developed from that need. But our search for security in the mental field,—although it has sprung from the same basic need—has taken quite a different turn. Where the physical need for security has developed the herd-instinct which promotes the chances of survival of the species—the psychological greed for the survival of the ‘ego’ has made of life a free fight with the sole object of survival of the individual.

Any striving for deliverance becomes a striving for achievement, for perfection, for salvation. And this, in the light of what we have understood already about the hallucination, the delusion, of continued individuality as a soul or spiritual entity at the dissolution of the body—this becomes a clearly impossible contradiction. The non-existent ‘self’ strives for the emancipation of that ‘self’.

It is obvious, therefore, that when the Buddha spoke of deliverance, it was the deliverance from the delusion of self, and not an emancipation of a spiritual super-self. It is indeed a most cunning device developed by the desire for continuity in the face of material dissolution at any stage, to project that desire into a spiritual continuity, when the ‘ego’ as a super-soul may even find a complete absorption into the absolute. This device as well as its solution, having originated in the mind as an ideal of perfection, remains for all its lofty aspirations an ideal, which is an idea without any reality. It is the supreme escape from conflict, and frequently has lulled the mind in ecstasy and rapture, which were presented by the Buddha as a rebirth in the highest heavens of Brahma.

But an escape is no deliverance; and that alone can be the complete ending of conflict. Just as the problem has arisen with the delusion of self-individuality seeking permanence, the solution must lie with the dissolution of that delusion. And no amount of striving for self-purification, for greater knowledge, greater virtue can dissolve that ‘self’-concept. It is not through the acquisition of merit, not through increased knowledge, not through abnegation or sacri-

fice, but only through insight, that this delusion can be seen as such. This insight cannot be brought about by forcing oneself to see; for, first of all, we do not know what to see. If we knew that, we would have made the discovery long ago already, and there would be no need for further striving. Moreover, all striving is of 'self' and has the 'self' as an ideal goal. And thus, all positive and purposeful striving will only deepen the problem. We may be able to drive the conflict underground in a process of sublimation, but that will make it all the more difficult to unearth it.

The effort of seeing should then not be directed towards a goal. One will never see the beauty of a flower by dissecting it. Even an attempt at defining or describing its beauty will never equal the living experience, which can only be had by seeing it without distraction. The most common distractions are a desire for continuance of the experience, and a desire to possess the object; in other words: desire to do something about it. That has been the blight of all so-called spiritual life: We want to do something about it.

But a living experience leaves no room for thoughts of possession, of continuance, of improvement. It is just the fullness of experiencing without any thought, idea or ideal about it. In that experience there cannot be any room for thought about the experiencer, that is the 'self'. It is in that fullness of a complete action that there is no 'self', no purpose, no volition, no will, no greed. Such a perfect act is complete in itself, and need not, nay *cannot* project itself in a reaction, a result, an effect which is rebirth.

That is deliverance.

Please, do not ask: How to see? There is no method, no book with instructions on how to use your eyes.

But when you see, do not approve, do not condemn. Because that is not seeing. It is an act of comparison of the living present with the dead memory of the past. And in that act we also kill the present.

But if we see with a completely detached and unprejudiced mind, then without judgement we may not be able to define the truth, but we shall experience the false as false. And that is truth. When I see a child at play in make-believe, I need not condemn, because I see it as play. I may even join the child and yet be free; for I know and see it as play. In this awareness there is no memory; in this action there is no attachment; in this dream there is no fear; in this realisation there is no delusion, as in love there is no lover.

And when there is no self, there is no conflict.
When there is no conflict, there is no problem.
When there is no problem, there is no escape.
When there is no escape, there is no becoming.
When there is no becoming, there is no fear.
When there is no fear, there is no doubt.

When there is no doubt, there is understanding, and security, and well being, and rest, and peace, and the knowledge that this peace can never be disturbed by make-believe, by a delusion, by an ideal. And in that realisation is experienced the ending of all conflict.

About the Author

Henri van Zeyst was born in Utrecht, the Netherlands, in 1905. Educated throughout in Catholic schools and colleges, he spent his final years of studies in philosophy and theology and his first year his priestly ordination in an Italian monastery near Florence. At the age of 31 he was sent to London to be in charge of a new foundation of his Order, where he was also teaching Dogmatic Theology to the scholastics of Christus Rex Priory in North London. An intensive course of comparative religion brought him in contact with Buddhism. Within a year of his coming to Sri Lanka he was ordained a Buddhist monk there in 1938 under the name of Bhikkhu Dhammapala. From 1956 to 1968 he worked at the Encyclopaedia of Buddhism at the University of Ceylon in Peradeniya of which he was in the final years of that period the Senior Assistant Editor and Administrative Officer. During the last stages of his life he was residing in a meditation centre at Nilambe, Kandy, giving instructions to those who came to him for guidance on meditation.

He died on 15 September, 1988.